

5 KEYS TO REMEMBER WHEN SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES WITH YOUTH

Any time you are working with young people, there will be constant opportunities to set boundaries. Think of your boundaries as an imaginary circle around you that includes your time, energy, emotional energy, personal life, personal stories, etc. Not all youth will have experienced healthy and consistent boundaries. They may not know when they are crossing your boundaries or pushing right up to the edge of your boundaries. And, honestly, they may not even know how to set a healthy boundary. That's why it will be important for you to model and communicate your boundaries with them. Here are 5 keys to remember when setting healthy boundaries with youth.

ACCESS

In today's world of technology, almost everything is at our fingertips. We don't have to wait to find out answers that we can look up ourselves. Truthfully, we seem to have 24 hour access to anything or anyone we want. And, young people sometimes believe they have 24/7 access to you. It's important to establish boundaries in regards to times of contact, frequency and what constitutes an emergency. This actually models healthy relationships for young people. Remember, it is okay for you to set boundaries that honors your life outside of working with young people. As a parent, your teens will have access to you, but just know that it's also okay to set boundaries. This can help your teens to understand their needs and wants are not always an emergency, even if it feels like it to them.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Most young people will have access to multiple social media platforms. Take time to think about how you want to engage with them on social media. Do you want to follow them? Do you want them to follow you? Are you okay if they choose to use certain language or if they share images you consider inappropriate? Do you want them to have access to information about your personal life and relationships?

Set clear expectations around what you will address if you see it on their social media or if they share those things on your accounts. Remember, it is okay to limit your interaction if that feels most comfortable to you. Keep in mind though, social media is here to stay and can be a great way to model your faith and healthy relationships.

5 KEYS TO SETTING BOUNDARIES CONTINUED

PERSONAL STORIES

Believe it or not, most young people are not looking for you to be their best friend. And, they don't want or need all the intimate details of your life. Yes, they will want you to share some things as that is a part of building trust. But, rarely do they expect you to tell them everything. Think about what stories you will share from your own experience as a tween or teen. Planning ahead will allow you to balance how much to share and when to share it.

It is also okay to choose not to share at times if the situation is not healthy or if you don't feel comfortable. You can always ask yourself "Is this something I am willing to share with others? And, am I okay if others find out what I shared?" If your answer is no, that's a good indication not to share those things at that time.

As mentioned earlier, not all young people understand what healthy boundaries are. That is why it is important for you to take the lead on choosing what you will and will not share. You are also modeling healthy boundaries in regards to personal information.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

When you work with young people, at times they will share personal and emotional situations with you. You must know your limits. As a youth worker, you are not expected to serve as a counselor for the youth. If you feel uncomfortable or uncertain what to do or say, reach out for support. And, if a young person is ever in an unsafe situation, make sure you are working closely with community resources and supports to assist them.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUTH

Whatever boundaries you set, make sure you are communicating clearly with your young people. At times, our boundaries may be different for different youth. Boundaries can shift and change as needed. When we take time to communicate why we set certain boundaries with youth, it can have a positive impact on your relationship. You also will need to communicate your boundaries often to the young people in your life.

